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The Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America is a federation of twenty-five national religious bodies through which they are rendering united service. Articles appearing herein furnish information on current issues and are not to be construed as declarations of official attitudes or policies of the Federal Council of Churches.

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Church Membership Trends Between 1926 and 1943-44

Church membership officially reported for the Continental United States increased 32.8 per cent between 1926 and 1943-44, and the number of local churches increased 9.3 per cent. The 52 religious bodies having over 50,000 members, and reporting for both periods, added 16,995,642 persons to their rolls, while 133 smaller bodies added only 217,343 persons. Fifty of the 133 smaller bodies reported decreases. Six of the 52 larger bodies reported decreases.

In this study comparisons are made between the figures on church membership reported in the Census of Religious Bodies, 1926, and those in the latest summary of official reports of church membership published in the *Yearbook of American Churches, 1945,** mainly for the years ending in 1943 and 1944. The totals for 1943-44 appeared in INFORMATION SERVICE for September 8, 1945.

The Census of Religious Bodies for 1926 was generally accepted as an adequate report. The Bureau of the Census sent schedules to all local congregations and tabulated results. The experience with the 1936 Census was decidedly otherwise. (See INFORMATION SERVICE for January 2, 1940.) It has been estimated that about 20 per cent of the ministers and clerks of the local congregations did not reply.

This study brings together the figures for 1926 and the latest information for all bodies. The figures for 1943-44 were gathered by mailing a blank to the official statisticians of 256 religious bodies. In certain instances religious bodies do not make annual reports and for these the data gathered in the 1936 Census of Religious Bodies were included.

As is indicated in Table I, below, inclusive church membership increased from 54,576,346 persons in 1926 to 72,492,669 in 1943-44, an increase of 32.8 per cent. In this interval the number of members 13 years of age and over increased 33.4 per cent; the number of religious bodies reporting increased 20.8 per cent; the number of local churches increased 9.3 per cent; and the estimated population increased 17.9 per cent.

As was pointed out in INFORMATION SERVICE for September 8, 1945, the total church membership of 72,492,669 persons in 1943-44 represented an increase of 3,991,483 persons over the figure published two years previously. This increase was in large part accounted for by the fact that a separate report appeared for the first time from the National Baptist Convention of America, the unincorporated body, with 2,352,339 members in 1944.

When considering the significance of the figures, it must be noted that nothing is known about the proportion of members who are no longer residents in the community of the reporting congregations. We understand that the non-resident members are generally included by the statisticians who report. The proportion of non-resident members is believed by certain informed persons to run from ten per cent to 30 per cent, but there are no studies of the general situation. It is entirely probable that the shifting of population in the last five years has resulted in many instances in the loss of contacts between the local churches and many of the persons whose names are on its membership rolls. Also, nothing is known about church attendance, or the proportion of members who make financial contributions, or the proportion participating in a significant way in the life and work of the local congregation.

In this study special attention is paid to the religious bodies that report on a comparable basis for both periods. In Table II we bring together data on trends in church membership by groups of religious bodies. These are gross figures, covering all the members reported by all the denominations included within the group. The figures show that the Churches of God gained 203.2 per cent in membership; the Evangelistic Associations, 91.3 per cent; the Mennonite Bodies, 73.9 per cent; the Baptist Bodies, 68.3 per cent; the Latter Day Saints, 62.8 per cent; the Adventist Bodies, 58.4 per cent; the Church of Christ, Scientist, 33.1 per cent; the Lutheran Bodies, 29.3 per cent; the Roman Catholic Church, 25.9 per cent; the Methodist Bodies, 22.9 per cent; the Jewish Congregations, 13.7 per cent; the Presbyterian Bodies, 11.8 per cent; the Friends, 3.3 per cent. Thus there are wide variations in the percentage of increase. It will be noted that the latest figures for the Church of Christ, Scientist, and the Jewish Congregations are for the year 1936.

Out of the 256 religious bodies reporting in 1943-44, only 185 reported in 1926. As shown in Table III, these bodies reporting on a comparable basis for both periods showed an increase of 31.6 per cent in the period under review. Of these, the 52 larger bodies having 50,000 members and over reported 53,386,145 members in 1926 and 70,381,787 in 1943-44, a gain of 16,995,642 members, or 31.8 per cent. The smaller bodies having less than

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50,000 members reported 1,149,532 members in 1926 and 1,366,875 persons in 1943-44, a gain of 217,343 persons, or 18.9 per cent. Forty-seven larger "Protestant" bodies reported 30,423,677 persons in 1926 and 41,520,902 persons in 1943-44, a gain of 36.5 per cent—these bodies did not include Eastern Orthodox, Polish Catholic, Roman Catholic or the Jewish congregations. The constituent bodies of the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America, for which comparable figures for both periods were available, reported a membership gain of 21.5 per cent.

Table IV presents the membership figures of the 52 larger religious bodies reporting for both 1926 and 1943-44. Six of these reported decreases. Table V shows the membership of the 133 smaller bodies reporting for both periods. Of these 50 reported decreases.

In this study no use has been made of the term "sect" or "small sect." No attempt has been made to use classification or grouping of churches other than that of the Census of Religious Bodies. This study would appear to indicate, however, that, contrary to the impressions of some reporters, the small bodies fall as well as rise. The data also indicate that many of the less conventional bodies, both small and large, are making the more spectacular gains.

TABLE I

Church Membership and Population—1926 and 1943-44

	1926	*1943-44*	*Per Cent of Increase*
Inclusive Church Membership.....	54,576,346	72,492,669	32.8
Members 13 Years of Age and Over.....	44,752,604	59,717,107	33.4
No. of Bodies Reporting	212	256	20.8
No. of Local Churches	232,154	253,762	9.3
Estimated Population (Continental United States)	117,136,000	138,100,874	17.9

TABLE II

Trends in Church Membership, by Groups of Religious Bodies, 1926 and 1943-44

Reported By	*1926*	*1943-44*	*Per Cent of Increase*
Adventist Bodies.....	146,177	231,500	58.4
Baptist Bodies.....	8,440,922	14,208,193	68.3
Church of Christ, Scientist.....	202,098	268,915 (1936)	33.1
Churches of God.....	65,051	197,231	203.2
Evangelistic Associations..	15,763	30,149	91.3
Federated Churches.....	59,977	88,411 (1936)	47.4
Friends.....	110,422	114,069	3.3
Independent Churches....	40,381	40,275 (1936)	.2 Dec.
Jewish Congregations..	4,081,242	4,641,184 (1936)	13.7
Latter Day Saints.....	606,561	987,315	62.8
Lutheran Bodies.....	3,966,003	5,129,147	29.3
Mennonite Bodies.....	87,164	151,587	73.9
Methodist Bodies.....	8,070,619	9,924,842	22.9
Presbyterian Bodies....	2,625,284	2,933,768	11.8
Roman Catholic Church	18,605,003	23,419,701	25.9

TABLE III

Comparison of Membership of Those Religious Bodies Reporting Both in 1926 and in 1943-44

	1926	*1943-44*	*Per Cent of Increase*
185 Religious Bodies Reporting for Both Periods.....	54,535,677	71,748,662	31.6
52 Larger Bodies Having 50,000 Members and Over	53,386,145	70,381,787	31.8
47 Larger Bodies, Non-Catholic and Non-Jewish (1)....	30,423,677	41,520,902	36.5
22 Bodies Constituent of the Fed. Council (2)	22,181,621	26,961,353	21.5
16 Bodies Reporting to the United Stewardship Council (3)	20,266,709	24,679,784	21.8
133 Smaller Bodies Having Less Than 50,000 Members....	1,149,532	1,366,875	18.9

(1) Does not include Eastern Orthodox, Polish Catholic, Roman Catholic or Jewish Congregations.

(2) The constituent bodies of the Federal Council in the U. S., in 1943-44, for which comparable figures for 1926 were available.

(3) As compiled by the United Stewardship Council and published in INFORMATION SERVICE of September 8, 1945.

TABLE IV

Membership of Larger Bodies—With 50,000 Members and Over in 1926, or in 1943-44, or both.

	1926	*1943-44*	*Per Cent of Increase or Decrease*
Seventh Day Adventists..	110,998	194,832	75.5
Assemblies of God.....	47,950	227,349	374.1
Baptist Bodies:			
Northern Baptist Convention.....	1,289,966	1,555,914	20.6
Southern Baptist Convention.....	3,524,378	5,667,926	60.8
[5]National Baptist Convention U.S.A. Inc.....	3,196,623	4,021,618	99.4
[5]National Baptist Convention of America....		2,352,339	
American Baptist Association.....	117,858	115,022 (1936)	2.4 Dec.
Free Will Baptists....	79,592	118,871 (1940)	49.3
Primitive Baptists.....	81,374	69,157 (1936)	15.0 Dec.
United American Free Will Baptist Church...	13,396	75,000	459.8
Church of the Brethren....	128,392	180,287	40.4
Church of Christ, Scientist.....	202,098	268,915 (1936)	33.0
Churches of God:			
Church of God.....	23,247	67,137	188.8
Church of God (Anderson, Ind.).....	38,249	83,875 (1942)	119.2
Church of God in Christ....	30,263	300,000	891.3
Church of the Nazarene....	63,558	187,082	194.0
Churches of Christ.....	433,714	309,551 (1936)	28.6 Dec.
[1]Congregational Christian Churches.....	994,491	1,075,401	8.1
Disciples of Christ.....	1,377,595	1,672,354	21.4
Eastern Orthodox Churches:			
Greek Orthodox Church Hellenic.....	119,495	250,000 (Est.)	109.2
Russian Orthodox Church	95,154	300,000 (1942)	215.2
[2]Evangelical and Reformed Church.....	675,804	675,958	.02
Evangelical Church.....	206,080	255,881	24.2
Federated Churches.....	59,977	88,411 (1936)	47.4
Friends, Five Years Meeting.....	91,326	70,000	23.4 Dec.
Jewish Congregations ..	4,081,242	4,641,184 (1936)	13.7
Latter Day Saints:			
Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints..	542,194	870,346	60.5
Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints....	64,367	113,064	75.7
Lutherans:			
American Lutheran Conference:			
Evangelical Lutheran Augustana Synod of N. A.....	311,425	373,163	19.8
[3]American Lutheran Church.....	474,923	584,499	23.1
Norwegian Lutheran Church of America....	496,707	595,034	19.8
Lutheran Synodical Conference of N. A.:			
Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio and Other States.....	1,040,275	1,356,655	30.4

Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States	229,242	324,492	41.5
United Lutheran Church in America	1,214,340	1,690,204	39.2
Mennonite Church	34,039	51,813	52.2
Methodist Bodies:			
African Methodist Episcopal Church	545,814	868,735 (1942)	59.2
African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church	456,813	489,244	7.1
Colored Methodist Episcopal Church	202,713	382,000	88.4
[4]The Methodist Church	6,760,642	8,046,129	19.0
Polish National Catholic Church	61,574	250,000	306.0
Presbyterian Bodies:			
Cumberland Presbyterian Church	67,938	64,984	4.3 Dec.
Presbyterian Church in the U. S.	451,043	565,853	25.5
Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.	1,894,030	2,040,399	7.7
United Presbyterian Church of N.A.	171,571	193,637	12.9
The Protestant Episcopal Church	1,859,086	2,227,524	19.8
Reformed Bodies:			
Christian Reformed Church	98,534	128,914	30.8
Reformed Church in America	153,739	169,390	10.2
Roman Catholic Church	18,605,003	23,419,701	25.9
The Salvation Army	74,768	208.329	178.6
Unitarian Churches	60,152	62,593	4.1
United Brethren in Christ	377,436	433,480	14.9
Universalist Church	54,957	47,541	13.5 Dec.
Total: 52 Bodies	53,386,145	70,381,787	31.8

[1] Includes Congregational and General Convention of the Christian Church, merged in 1931.

[2] Includes Reformed in the U .S. and Evangelical Synod of N. A., merged in 1934.

[3] A merger of three bodies in 1930; 1926 figures include the three bodies.

[4] The figures for 1926 are a total of those reported for the M. E. Church, the M. E. Church South, and the Methodist Protestant Church.

[5] Negro Baptists in 1926 include both Incorporated and Unincorporated Bodies.

TABLE V

Membership of Smaller Bodies, Reporting Both for 1926 and 1943-44

	1926	*1943-44*	*Per Cent of Increase or Decrease*
Advent Christian Church	29,430	30,547	3.8
Church of God Adventtist	3,528	5,295 (1940)	50.0
Life and Advent Union	535	288	46.1 Dec.
African Orthodox Church	1,568	5,200 (1942)	231.6
Amana Society	1,385	880	36.4 Dec.
American Ethical Union	3,801	2,875	24.3 Dec.
American Rescue Workers	1,989	300 (1942)	84.9 Dec.
Apostolic Overcoming Holy Church of God	1,047	8,000 (1942)	664.0
Armenian Orthodox Church in America	28,181	18,787 (1936)	33.3 Dec.
Assyrian Jacobite Apostolic Church	1,407	3,100 (1936)	120.3
Baha'i Faith	1,247	4,489 (1942)	259.9
Baptist Bodies:			
General Six Principle Baptists	293	280	4.4 Dec.
Seventh Day Baptists	7,264	6,581	9.4 Dec.
Seventh Day Baptists (German, 1728)	144	125	13.2 Dec.
General Baptists	31,501	39,600 (1942)	25.7
Separate Baptists	4,803	6,490	35.1
Regular Baptists	23,091	17,186 (1936)	25.6 Dec.
United Baptists	18,903	27,000 (1936)	42.8
Duck River and Kindred Associations of Baptists	7,340	7,951 (1936)	8.3
Colored Primitive Baptists	43,978	43,897 (1936)	.2 Dec
Two-Seed-In-The-Spirit Predestinarian Baptists	304	201 (1936)	33.9 Dec.
Independent Baptist Church	222	129 (1936)	41.9 Dec.
Old German Baptist Brethren	3,036	3,271 (1936)	7.7
Brethren Church (Progressive Dunkers)	26,026	17,669	32.1 Dec.
Church of God (New Dunkers)	650	526	19.1 Dec.
Plymouth Brethren	22,901	25,806 (1936)	12.4
Brethren in Christ	4,320	5,171	19.7
Old Order or Yorker Brethren	472	291 (1936)	38.3 Dec.
United Zion's Children.	905	1,025 (1940)	13.3
Catholic Apostolic Church	3,408	2,577 (1936)	24.4 Dec.
Christadelphians	3,352	2,755 (1936)	17.8 Dec.
Christian and Missionary Alliance	22,737	40,283	77.2
Christian Union	8,791	15,400 (1938)	75.2
Church of Christ, Holiness	4,914	11,751	139.1
Church of God and Saints of Christ	6,741	37,084 (1936)	450.1
Churches of God, Holiness	2,278	5,872 (1936)	157.8
Churches of God in N. A., (Gen. Eldership)	31,596	33,563	6.2
Church of the Living God	11,558	120	99.0 Dec.
Church of the Living God, "The Pillar and Ground of the Truth"	5,844	4,838 (1936)	17.2 Dec.
Gen'l Convention of the New Jerusalem	5,442	5,175	4.9 Dec.
General Church of the New Jerusalem	996	1,387	39.2
Congregational Holiness	939	2,849	203.4
Divine Science College and Church	3,466	4,085 (1936)	17.9
Albanian Orthodox Church	1,993	3,137 (1936)	57.4
Bulgarian Orthodox Church	937	1,336 (1940)	42.6
Roumanian Orthodox Church	18,853	21,000	11.4
Serbian Orthodox Church	13,775	42,000	204.9
Evangelical Congregational Church	20,449	25,952	26.9
Evangelistic Associations:			
Apostolic Christian Church	5,709	1,663 (1936)	70.9 Dec.
Apostolic Faith Mission	2,119	2,288 (1936)	8.0
Christian Congregation	150	3,820	2446.6
Church of Daniel's Band	129	131	1.6
Church of God as Organized by Christ.	375	2,192 (1938)	484.5
Hephzibah Faith Missionary Association	495	350	29.3 Dec.
Metropolitan Church Association	1,113	961 (1936)	13.7 Dec.
Missionary Church Association	2,498	5,000 (1942)	100.2

Missionary Bands of the World	241	190	21.2	Dec.
Pillar of Fire	2,442	4,044 (1936)	65.6	
Church of God, Apostolic	492	3,085 (1938)	527.0	
Free Christian Zion Church of Christ	187	2,478	1225.1	
Religious Society of Friends, General Conference	16,105	17,870	11.0	
Religious Society of Friends, Conservative	2,966	3,351 (1936)	13.0	
Primitive Friends	25	13 (1936)	48.0	Dec.
Holiness Church	861	453	47.4	Dec.
Independent Churches	40,381	40,275 (1936)	.3	Dec.
Liberal Catholic Church	1,799	2,000 (1940)	11.2	
Lithuanian National Reformed Church	1,497	3,325 (1940)	122.1	
Lutherans:				
Slovak Evangelical Lutheran Synod of U. S. A.	14,759	22,186	50.3	
Norwegian Synod of the Amer. Evang. Lutheran Church	8,344	8,853	6.1	
Evangelical Lutheran Church of Amer. (Eielsen Synod)	1,087	1,400	28.8	
Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church in Amer.	18,921	18,813	.6	Dec.
Icelandic Evangelical Lutheran Synod in N. A.	2,186	1,386 (1941)	36.6	Dec.
Finnish Evangelical Luth. Church of Amer. (Suomi Synod)	32,071	28,365	11.5	Dec.
Finnish Evangelical Luth. Natl. Church in Amer.	7,788	5,928 (1942)	23.9	Dec.
Lutheran Free Ch.	46,366	49,583	6.9	
United Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church in Amer.	29,198	34,628	18.6	
Finnish Apostolic Lutheran Church	24,016	14,511	39.6	Dec.
Church of the Lutheran Brethren in America	1,700	2,250 (1940)	32.4	
Independent Lutheran Churches	11,804	2,423 (1936)	79.5	Dec.
Mennonites:				
Hutterian Brethren	700	265 (1942)	62.1	Dec.
Conservative Amish Mennonite Church	691	3,936	469.6	
Old Order Amish Mennonite Church	6,006	13,408	123.2	
Church of God in Christ	1,832	3,000	63.8	
Old Order Mennonite Church (Wisler)	2,227	2,975	33.6	
Reformed Mennonite Church	1,117	1,500 (1942)	34.3	
Gen'l Conference of the Mennonite Church in N. A.	21,582	40,000	85.3	
Defenseless Menonites	1,060	1,626	53.4	
Mennonite Brethren in Christ	5,882	10,061	71.0	
Mennonite Brethren Ch. of N. A.	6,484	16,125 (1941)	148.7	
Krimmer Mennonite Breth. Conference	797	1,558 (1940)	95.5	
Men. Kleine Gemeinde	214	275 (1936)	28.5	
Central Conference of Mennonites	3,124	3,216	2.9	
Stauffer Mennonite Church	243	167	31.2	Dec.
Unaffiliated Mennonite Churches	348	422	21.3	
Methodist Bodies:				
Wesleyan Methodist Connection in Amer.	21,910	29,331	33.9	
Primitive Methodist Church	11,990	12,185 (1942)	1.6	
Congregational Methodist Church	9,691	16,163 (1941)	66.8	
Free Methodist Ch. of N. A.	36,374	46,783	28.6	
New Congregational Methodist Church	1,229	1,449 (1936)	17.9	
Holiness Meth. Ch.	459	578 (1942)	25.9	
Reformed Meth. Ch.	390	326	16.4	Dec.
Union Amer. Meth. Episcopal Church	10,169	9,369 (1936)	7.9	Dec.
African Union First Colored Methodist Protestant Ch.	4,086	2,597	36.4	Dec.
Reformed Zion Union Apostolic Church	4,538	3,000	33.9	Dec.
Ref'm'd Meth. Union Episcopal Church	2,265	3,000 (1942)	32.5	
Moravian Church (Unitas Fratrum)	31,699	40,764	28.6	
Bohemian and Moravian Brethren Churches	303	250	17.5	Dec.
Evangelical Unity of Bohemian & Moravian Breth. of N. A.	5,241	4,538 (1940)	13.4	Dec.
New Apostolic Church of N. A.	2,938	5,535	88.4	
Old Catholic Church in Amer.	1,888	6,274 (1940)	232.3	
The (Original) Church of God.	1,869	5,000	167.5	
Pentecostal Assemblies of the World	7,850	5,713 (1936)	27.2	Dec.
Pentecostal Holiness Church	8,096	24,910	207.7	
Pilgrim Holiness Ch.	15,040	25,668	70.7	
Presbyterian Bodies:				
Colored Cumberland Presbyterian Ch.	10,868	30,000	176.0	
Associate Reformed Presbyterian Ch.	20,410	23,385	14.6	
Reformed Pres. Ch. in N. A. (Genl. Synod)	1,929	1,559	19.2	Dec.
Associate Pres. Ch.	329	250 (1940)	24.0	Dec.
Reformed Pres. Ch. of N. A.	7,166	6,617	7.7	Dec.
Free Magyar Reformed Church in America	3,992	6,126 (1942)	53.5	
Reformed Epis. Church	8,651	8,939	3.3	
Norwegian and Danish Evangelical Free Ch. Asso. of N. A.	3,781	10,033	165.4	
The Evangelical Free Church of Amer.	8,166	11,052	35.3	
Evangelical Mission Covenant Church of Amer.	36,838	48.000	30.3	
Schwenkfelders	1,596	2,050 (1942)	28.4	
Social Brethren	1,214	521 (1940)	57.0	Dec.
National Christian Spiritual Alliance	2,015	5,487	172.3	
National Spiritualist Asso.	41,233	11,266 (1936)	72.7	Dec.
Progressive Spiritual Church	7,383	11,347 (1936)	53.7	
United Christian Ch.	577	676 (1942)	17.1	
Church of the United Brethren in Christ (Old Constitution)	17,872	15,401 (1936)	13.8	Dec.
Vedanta Society	200	30 (1942)	85.0	Dec.
Volunteers of America.	28,756	4,230	85.2	Dec.
Total, 133 Bodies	1,149,532	1,366,875	18.9	

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